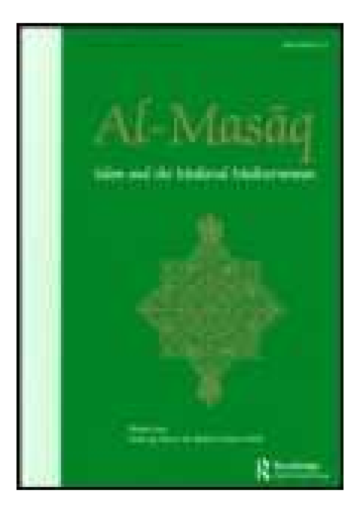


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Sultans' Paradise: The Royal Necropolis of Shāla, Rabat[1]

PÉTER TAMÁS NAGY

ABSTRACT *The following study concerns Shāla, which was the necropolis of the Marīnid rulers from 683/1284 to 752/1351. The Islamic buildings on the site have rarely received scholarly attention, although these edifices – despite their delapidated condition – are among the most important constructed by the dynasty. One of my main aims is to re-establish the buildings' chronological sequence, using the written and archaeological evidence, including publications about the site written in Arabic, which have hardly been considered so far. I also address the meaning and aims behind structure erected for each founder, which, in my view, have been misinterpreted by previous scholarship. In summary, this article attempts to revise our knowledge about the site.*

Keywords: Architecture – secular; Africa; Morocco – architecture; Rabat; Morocco – Shāla necropolis; Marīnids; Berber dynasty; Architectural patronage – in Africa

When surveying the architecture of the Marīnids, the dynasty that ruled the western Maghrib between 668/1269 and 870/1465, one may be momentarily surprised by this monumental complex. Set beside the Bū Regreg River in Rabat, Shāla (misleadingly spelt Chella) is an irregular pentagonal site, surrounded by a ca. 1 km long wall (Figure 1) with apparently Roman ruins and Islamic structures within. Despite being referred to as the "Marīnid necropolis", the size of the enclosure suggests more than a few tombs and the way the whole area was used is not clear to us. However, my main goal in the following study is to concentrate on the chronology, meaning and function of the Marīnid *khalwa* or religious complex, as it was intended to be used by the various patrons.

The Banū Marīn tribe of Zanāta Berber origin lived semi-nomadically in the area of what is today eastern Morocco until the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century. Then they gradually began fighting against the Almohad dynasty (541–668/1147–1269) under the leadership of ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq (d. 614/1217), Abū Saʿīd I (d. 638/1240), Abū Maʿrūf (d. 642/1244) and Abū Yaḥyā (d. 656/1258). The real founder of the Marīnid dynasty, Abū Yūsuf (r. 656–685/1258–1286),

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[1] I wish to thank Gabriella Sárváry for correcting the English of my draft. I would also like to express my gratitude to my former professor, Iván Szántó, from whom I have received several comments and advice, and finally to Máté Horváth for his careful checking of my Arabic translations.



Figure 1. Shāla, general view (all photographs are by the author)

conquered the Almohad capital, Marrakesh, in 668/1269 and also led several campaigns against the Christian powers of Spain and Portugal. Abū l-Ḥasan (r. 731–752/1331–1351) also attempted *jihād* against Christians, but with little success. In 741/1340, the united Christian armies defeated the Muslims in the battle of Tarifa (also known as battle of Río Salado). Further expansionist aims eastwards were more successful. In 1348, Abū l-Ḥasan led a campaign against the Maghrib and conquered it as far as Tripoli. While he was fighting in North Africa, his son, Abū ʿInān (r. 749–759/1348–1358), gathered his own army and usurped the throne. Abū l-Ḥasan had no alternative but to return Morocco, and his life ended in the civil war that followed. Abū ʿInān was the last powerful Marīnid ruler to establish splendid monuments. After him, the sultans became the puppets of their viziers.[2] As we shall see, this first half of the Marīnid era was also the heyday of architectural patronage in Shāla.

All Marīnid buildings on the site are within the *khalwa*, except for a bath and a residential building near the main gate. The *khalwa* forms a rectangle ca. 44 m long and 29 m wide (for a site plan see Figure 2). The walls are still several metres high but no roof can be seen *in situ*. The main gate opens on the north-western wall about one third along from the right (no. 1), leading the visitor to an L-shaped courtyard (no. 2). Proceeding forward, one finds a mosque (no. 4) and a well for ablutions (no. 3). The mosque has two doors on either side of the *miḥrāb*, leading to the funerary court, where the *qubba*s or mausolea (nos 5–9) are situated. The north-eastern part of the *khalwa* contains a rectangular courtyard (no. 10), alternatively called *zāwiya* (*ṣūfī* convent) or *madrasa*, and a prayer hall (no. 11).

Islamic Shāla first received scholarly attention more than 90 years ago, when Muḥammad Būjandār introduced the site to Arabic readers.[3] Then Henri

[2] For an introduction to the history of the Marīnids see Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 120–37.

[3] Muḥammad Būjandār al-Rabāṭī, *Shāla wa-āthāru-hā: Kitāb fī tārīkh zāwiyat Shāla bi-l-Rabāṭ wa-waṣf āthāri-hā fī-l-qadīm wa-l-ḥadīth* (Rabāṭ: Maṭbaʿat al-Jarīda al-Rasmiyya, 1340AH).

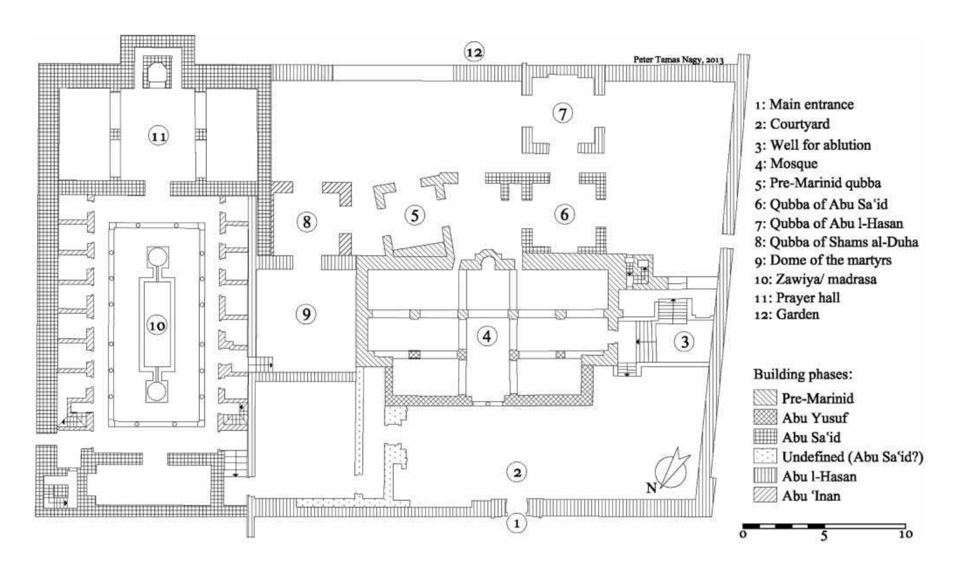


Figure 2. General plan and proposed chronology of the *khalwa*

Basset and Évariste Lévi-Provençal published three articles on its Islamic structures.[4] They stated that the rectangular complex (*khalwa*) had been built by two main patrons: Abū Yūsuf and Abū l-Ḥasan, and they attributed two mosques to them (nos 4 and 11, respectively). They also identified the Marīnid mausolea with their owners and discovered a communal funerary hall (no. 9), which had presumably been constructed for the previous rulers by Abū l-Ḥasan. Their general interpretation of Shāla states that the *mujāhid* (one who wages *jihād*) rulers of the Marīnid dynasty founded their necropolis in the form of a *ribāṭ* or fortress. The main intent – according to this view – was so that their subjects would revere them as *jihād* warriors. Georges Marçais accepted this opinion, supporting it by referring to earlier examples, when areas around *ribāṭ*s had been used as cemeteries.[5]

We have since – thanks largely to ʿUthmān ʿUthmān Ismāʿīl – acquired a more comprehensive understanding of the Islamic history of Shāla.[6] He re-examined the written sources that refer to the site, carried out excavations in some parts of the *khalwa*, and introduced us to Shāla as a city active from the time of the Idrīsid dynasty (172–375/788–985). He also pointed out several of Basset and Lévi-Provençal's misinterpretations, but despite his manifest opposition to the scholarship of the colonial period, he did pick up their notion about the "*jihādist*" significance of Shāla in Marīnid times.

[4] Henri Basset and Évariste Lévi-Provençal, "Chella: Une nécropole mérinide", *Hespéris: Archives Berbères et Bulletin de l'Institut des Hautes-Études Marocaines* 2 (1922): 1–92, 255–316, 385–425.

[5] Georges Marçais, *L'Architecture musulmane d'occident: Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc, Espagne et Sicile* (Paris: Arts et Métiers Graphiques, 1955), pp. 281–4.

[6] For the history, see ʿUthmān ʿUthmān Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Shāla al-Islāmiyya: Ṣafḥāt jadīda fī tārīkh al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā min ʿaṣr al-Adārisa ilā nihāyat ʿaṣr al-Marīniyyīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1390/1975); for the excavations, see *idem*, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla al-Islāmiyya: Abḥāth tārīkhiyya wa-kushūf athariyya bi-l-Maghrib al-Aqṣā* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1978). Finally a third volume, despite its title, is mostly about Shāla: *idem*, *Dirāsāt jadīda fī l-funūn al-Islāmiyya wa-l-nuqūsh al-ʿArabiyya bi-l-Maghrib al-Aqṣā* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, n.d.).

Since, to my knowledge, no archaeological investigation of the existing monuments has been thoroughly carried out,[7] dating problems sometimes obstruct the work of interpretation, so I shall present the chronological sequence of the buildings on the basis of, though not always in agreement with, the works of Ismāʿīl.[8]

As for the meaning of the site, we can only begin by examining the century-old "*jihādist*" interpretation of Basset and Lévi-Provençal. It was based on the historical context of a time when several Marīnid rulers crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to fight against Christians. Although the Marīnid rulers were undeniably honoured for centuries, the main weakness of the two scholars' notion is their inability to prove that they were buried in Shāla because of their identity as *mujāhid*s or whether this was the original and only intention of all persons buried there. The historical and archaeological sources on the site give no direct answer to these questions, even though scholarship on Shāla has never called this interpretation into doubt.[9]

Abū Yūsuf and the foundation of the Marīnid necropolis

The main reason for questioning the aforementioned "*jihadist*" notion arises from the fact that Abū Yūsuf first entombed his wife, al-Ḥurra Umm al-ʿIzz in Shāla in 683/1284.[10] The historical sources also reveal the existence of a mosque on the site,[11] erroneously identified by Basset and Lévi-Provençal with the prayer hall (Figure 3, no. 11) attached to the *zāwiya* or *madrasa* (no. 10, see below). As a matter of fact, the only mosque in Shāla that probably goes back to Idrīsid times is in the southern part of the complex (Figure 4, no. 4).[12] Then the ruler's own burial on the site followed.[13] His tomb has been identified with the remains in the prayer hall of the mosque, which was also extended with the addition of a third aisle by Abū Yūsuf.[14]

The architectural patronage of the Marīnid dynasty was influenced by the fact that the new leadership did not possess any religious authority. The search for legitimacy

[7] The most recent archaeological study to my knowledge is an unpublished work: Moulay Driss Sedra, "La nécropole de Chella, étude historique et archéologique de deux monuments: La mosquée et la madrasa". Since this study was not available to me, I could only obtain some information through references to it: Riyaz Mansur Latif, "Ornate Vision of Knowledge and Power: Formation of Marinid Madrasas in Maghrib al-Aqsā", PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2011. For the most recent introduction to Shāla, see Lamia Hadda and Luciana Jacobelli, *Le Parc archéologique de Chella* (Naples: L'Isola dei Ragazzi, 1998).

[8] For the chronology of the site, see building phases in Figure 2. This is based on my own surveys on the site, but, admittedly, more remains to be done.

[9] Although commemorative sites for *mujāhid*s were built in various parts of the Islamic world, the fact that such an idea was widespread does not in itself mean that this was the case in Shāla. For a survey of the mausolea of *mujāhid*s, see Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function and Meaning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 263–6.

[10] ʿAlī b. Abī Zarʿ al-Fāsī (d. after 726/1326), *Al-anīs al-muṭrib bi-rawḍ al-qirṭās fī akhbār mulūk al-Maghrib wa-tārīkh madīnat Fās*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Binmanṣūr (Rabat: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Mulkiyya, 1420/1999), p. 537.

[11] Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 492; Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Shāla*, 310–11.

[12] Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 163–89. For the mosque's history, see *ibid*, 307–32.

[13] Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 492; Abū l-Walīd Ismāʿīl b. al-Aḥmar (d. 808/1406), *Rawḍat al-niṣrīn fī dawlat Banī Marīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Binmanṣūr (Rabat: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Mulkiyya, 1382/1962), p. 18.

[14] Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 307–24, 368–73.



Figure 3. The *zāwiya-madrasa* of Shāla with its prayer hall

as Morocco's rightful rulers can be detected in various building projects, which partly continued the well-established tradition of previous dynasties, as exemplified by the foundation of a dynastic capital. In other cases, the rulers incorporated foreign types of building in their patronage, the most splendid examples being the *madrasas*.[15] Another tool was undeniably the practice of *jihād*, but nothing necessitates a connection between this and their necropolis; these princely tools were simply aimed at making them accepted as rightful rulers.

Another point worth mentioning is the burial of two Marīnid princes who preceded Abū Yūsuf. ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq, the ancestor and first warrior of the dynasty, was buried at a locality called Tāfarṭast. His tomb was most probably without any architectural significance until Abū Yūsuf repaired it and founded a *zāwiya* attached to it.[16] This action marks the conscious development of the site as a place of veneration, which was undeniably the achievement of Abū Yūsuf. On the other hand, it did not make ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq more like a *jihād* warrior, but only a religious hero and the respected founder of the dynasty.[17] The burial of another Marīnid leader, Abū Yaḥyā, is even more interesting in the present context. He desired to be buried at the Bāb al-Jīziyyīn of Fès in the vicinity of the tomb of a saint, Muḥammad al-Fashtālī, in order to receive the latter's *baraka* or blessing.[18] This meant that he had not attributed any sanctity to himself, although he had his own pious goal.

Being constructed inside a mosque, the first two Marīnid tombs in Shāla were built to receive veneration, probably for the authority of the interred deceased;

[15] Marçais, *L'Architecture musulmane*, 284–6; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 239–40. See also Maya Shatzmiller, "Les premiers Mérinides et le milieu religieux de Fès: L'introduction des médersas", *Studia Islamica* 43 (1976): 109–18.

[16] Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 491; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Khaldūn al-Maghribī (d. 808/1406), *Kitāb al-ʿibar wa-dīwān al-mubtadaʾ wa-l-khabar fī ayyām al-ʿArab wa-l-ʿajam wa-l-Barbar wa-man ʿāṣarahum min dhawī l-sulṭān al-akbar*, volumes I–XIV (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī/Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1420/1999), XIII: 435.

[17] Ibn al-Aḥmar informs us about this *baraka* in detail, which probably means that by the time of his writing in 806–807/1404, this had been accepted and well-known; Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Rawḍat al-nisrīn*, 15.

[18] Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 387.

this is all that we can say with certainty about Abū Yūsuf's intention. By conquering and unifying Morocco and part of Andalusia, Abū Yūsuf did indeed change the previous concept of a ruler. He was a powerful sovereign and a great builder, who founded a place of veneration for his own family and also for his father, ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq. The idea of commemorating the sultan was maintained under the following rulers: Abū Yaʿqūb (r. 685–706/1286–1307),[19] Abū Thābit (r. 706–708/1307–1308),[20] Abū Saʿīd II (r. 710–731/1310–1331),[21] and finally Abū l-Ḥasan,[22] who – according to written sources – were all buried in Shāla.

The remaining question about Shāla's early Marīnid use concerns the site's locus, for it is hard to accept that Abū Yūsuf desired to rest close to the places from which *mujāhid*s had set out, Rabat and Salé. Here we need to look back to Shāla's pre-Marīnid history, when it was a vigorous city, not a Roman town that had been in ruins for many centuries.[23]

The Roman site of Sala Colonia was never abandoned; the written sources explored by Ismāʿīl show continuous habitation throughout the centuries from ancient times. The Idrīsid dynasty had an important town here, and then the Banū Yafran Berber tribe established their state's capital in Shāla in the fourth–fifth/tenth–eleventh centuries. There is evidence of continuous occupation in the Almoravid (454–541/1062–1147) and Almohad period as well, and the most interesting issue concerns Leo Africanus' (d. ca. 1554) description of the achievements of Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (r. 580–595/1184–1199). According to this text, the Almohad ruler constructed a hospital, barracks, mosque and his tomb in Shāla, and the Marīnids retained Shāla as their burial site.[24] Since Leo Africanus saw monuments that are no longer standing today, there is no reason not to accept his account, even though we are right to be cautious about his knowledge of the site.[25]

Be that as it may, Abū Yūsuf chose an inhabited city, and one where princely graves had been located since the fifth/eleventh century, when – as Ismāʿīl discovered – two rulers of the Banū Yafran tribe were buried there (no. 5).[26] Abū Yūsuf followed a local tradition as he felt himself deserving of the privilege of veneration, but we still cannot connect this with the idea of *jihād*. In other words, he was a respected *mujāhid*, but we find no evidence that this would have been indicated on his tomb.

[19] *Ibid.*, 513; Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Rawḍat al-nisrīn*, 21.
[20] Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 518.
[21] One can find a contradiction between two sources: Ibn Khaldūn suggests that he was buried in Fās, while Ibn al-Aḥmar states he was interred in Shāla (Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar*, XIII: 525; Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Rawḍat al-nisrīn*, 24). See also Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Shāla*, 313–19, where the author argues for Abū Saʿīd's burial to have taken place in Shāla. He finally identifies his burial place with the *qubba* behind the mosque's *miḥrāb* on the right (Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 194–200, 337–40).
[22] Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar*, XIII: 597–8; Ibn al-Aḥmar, *Rawḍat al-nisrīn*, 25.
[23] See Ismāʿīl's publications about the reinterpreted early Islamic history of Shāla.
[24] Giovan Lioni Africano, "Della descrittione dell'Africa et delle cose notabili che ivi sono", in *Primo volume delle navigationi et viaggi*, ed. Giovanni Battista Ramusio (Venice: Heredi di Lucantonio Giunti, 1550), pp. 1a–103b, esp. 31b.
[25] It is far from being proved that the pre-Marīnid structures can be identified with the buildings of al-Manṣūr under the prayer hall of the complex, but it is at least a possibility; Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Shāla*, 257–63; *idem*, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 158–61.
[26] Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Shāla*, 221; *idem*, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 201–8.

Later development of Shāla

Another intention worthy investigating is that of Abū l-Ḥasan, who surrounded Shāla with ramparts and founded numerous buildings in the complex. If his patronage was meant to send a specific message, one might imagine that it would be suggested by the dedicational inscription on the main gate (Figure 5). It reads as follows:

> I take refuge in God from the stoned Satan; in the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful; may God bless and save our lord, Muḥammad and his family. Building the wall of this blessed ribāṭ was ordered by our master, the sultan, the leader of the Muslims, Abū l-Ḥasan, the son of our master, the sultan, the leader of the Muslims, the saint, the late Abū Saʿīd [...]. The completion was on the last day of Dhū l-Ḥijja in the year 739 [8 July 1339].[27]

However, this text in itself does not allow us to deduce the aim of the founder. The most important point is that it was meant as a *ribāṭ*, but naming the type of building does not necessarily bring us closer to its function.

It was assumed until the end of the last century that *ribāṭ* had mostly meant a place where a religious community lived for pious practices and *jihād*, but Jacqueline Chabbi has argued for separating these two functions. While *ribāṭ*s in the early centuries of Islam generally referred to defence posts along the North African coast, the term gradually became synonymous with the *zāwiya* or *ṣūfī* convent. These buildings were usually constructed around a shrine, maintaining the religious, but not the martial function of earlier *ribāṭ*s.[28] The confusion of the terms *ribāṭ* and *zāwiya* can also be found in primary sources: the building attached to ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq's tomb is called *zāwiya* by Ibn Abī Zarʿ and *ribāṭ* by Ibn Khaldūn.[29]

The eighth/fourteenth-century Moroccan historian, Ibn Marzūq (d. 781/1379), also explains these terms to us:

> These zāwiyas are what they call ribāṭs and khānaqas in the east [of the Islamic world]. The khānaqa is a name for the ribāṭ, and it is a Persian word. The ribāṭ – in jurisconsults' terminology – is an expression for a place for devoting oneself to jihād and guarding. For the ṣūfīs, it is an expression for a place in which worship is performed.[30]

[27] See the Arabic text with translation in Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 316.

[28] Jacqueline Chabbi, "Ribāṭ, 1: History and development of the institution", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., volumes I–XII (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004), VIII: 493–506, esp. 501–5. As she states, every *ribāṭ* must be considered in its own context; the name in itself does not indicate the function; see also Sheila S. Blair, Jonathan G. Katz, "Zāwiya, 1: Architecture, 2: In North Africa", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., volumes I–XII (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2004), XI: 466–8, and, for a similar opinion, Hugh Kennedy, "The Ribāṭ in the Early Islamic World", in *Western Monasticism Ante Litteram: The Spaces of Monastic Observance in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Hendrik Dey and Elizabeth Fentress (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 161–75; cf. Georges Marçais, "Ribāṭ", in *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Martijn Th. Houtsma et al., volumes I–VIII (Leiden: Brill, 1993, repr.), VI: 1150–3.

[29] Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 491; Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-ʿibar*, 435.

[30] Muḥammad b. Marzūq al-Tilimsānī, *Al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-ḥasan fī maʾāthir wa-maḥāsin mawlānā Abī l-Ḥasan*, ed. María J. Viguera (Algiers: al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1401/1981), p. 411.



Figure 4. The mosque of Shāla

From all this evidence, we can clearly see, that *ribāṭ*s did not necessarily have a martial function. One might add that Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217), the famous Mediterranean traveller, had already mentioned the equivalence of *ribāṭ* and *khānaqa* in connection with a *ṣūfī* edifice in Raʾs al-ʿAyn in northern Syria.[31] In the case of Shāla, we should explain the label on the basis of what the site really was: a religious complex with a mosque, shrines and accommodation for pilgrims (see more below).

An interesting phrase appears in Ibn Abī Zarʿ's book, which states that Abū Yaʿqūb was buried in the *ribāṭ* of Shāla. This stray comment led Ismāʿīl to infer that the site had been surrounded by ramparts before Abū l-Ḥasan and even before the Marīnids, and this even seems to be proved by the words of Leo Africanus, who mentions the buildings of the Almohad Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr.[32] However, if one reads the great traveller's words in Arabic (as Ismāʿīl did), one finds that Leo Africanus did not mention enclosure walls (*aswār*), but simply walls (*ḥawāʾiṭ*), after the city – and not its fortification – had been damaged.[33] Since we find neither clear historical nor archaeological evidence for it, we can assume that the site was unfortified until Abū l-Ḥasan's achievement, and the *ribāṭ* should be understood as a religious, *ṣūfī* communal structure without any military role. Abū l-Ḥasan only enclosed a large area and named it *ribāṭ*, but there is no need to consider any change in the meaning of this building type.

During Abū l-Ḥasan's patronage, the funerary complex of Shāla was redeveloped although the chronology of some structures is still uncertain. Without a doubt, he founded some *qubba*s (domed mausolea), but the patronage of the *madrasa* or

[31] Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jubayr, *Riḥla: The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. William Wright and Michael J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1907), p. 243, see also p. 284, where the author makes similar statements about some buildings in Damascus.

[32] Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 66–8, quoting Leo Africanus' text in Arabic.

[33] The French version of Leo Africanus' account (the origin of the Arabic translation) says "reconstruit les murs", while the first, Italian edition of the text says "rinouo le mura". See Jean-Léon l'Africain, *Déscription de l'Afrique*, trans. Alexis Épaulard, volumes I–II (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1956), I: 166; in the first edition: Africano, "Della descrittione … " 31b. The text is at least ambiguous, but on the site we can see no trace of an earlier rampart than that of Abū l-Ḥasan.



Figure 5. The main gate of Shāla

zāwiya (no. 10) and its *muṣallā* (prayer hall; Figure 3, no. 11) has been attributed to Abū Saʿīd II.[34] Abū l-Ḥasan founded a *qubba* for himself (Figure 6, no. 7) and interred several family members including his son, Abū Mālik (d. 740/1339) in Shāla.[35] A building of great interest is the common funerary hall (no. 9), which is quite hard to appreciate today. Basset and Lévi-Provençal first discovered it and attributed it to Abū l-Ḥasan. Then Ismāʿīl reconsidered this almost completely destroyed building, once covered with a dome and established to house the tombs of the martyrs of Tarifa.[36]

After presenting the south-western part of the complex – which includes every important structure except for the *zāwiya* or *madrasa* – we shall explain the placement of these buildings. The first courtyard and the mosque are surprisingly poor with no trace of decoration,[37] unlike the mausolea of the funerary court. This contrast in decoration one might perceive as representing a path leading from the poverty of earthly life towards paradise. The whole complex is directed towards Mecca with a spring (called *ʿAyn al-Janna* or "Spring of Paradise") flowing on its *qibla* side and feeding a beautiful garden (Figure 7, no. 12).

In the Islamic – as well as in the Christian – world, paradise and gardens were connected on a mental level;[38] thus the latter was the ideal place for a family necropolis. The intention of this pious attitude was most probably to anticipate salvation in an already prepared heaven. Reaching the courtyard of the mausolea, one can sense that

[34] Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 332.
[35] See Ismāʿīl, *Tārīkh Shāla*, 320–8, with references to historical sources.
[36] Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 216–25.
[37] Except for the tile mosaic decoration of the gate on the left side of the courtyard, but this must have belonged to a later phase in the construction of the complex (see below).
[38] The closest parallel is the Rawḍa in the contemporary Alhambra, conceived by Muḥammad II (r. 671–701/1273–1302). The funerary site of the Naṣrid rulers was founded to create their own paradise, the garden where every soul may rest in peace; James Dickie (Yaqub Zaki), "The Palaces of the Alhambra", in *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain*, ed. Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), pp. 135–51, esp. 144–5.

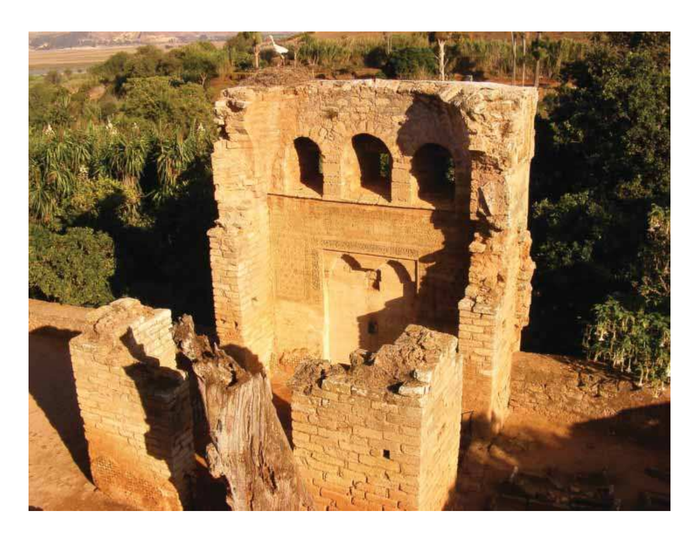


Figure 6. The qubba of Abū l-Ḥasan

the garden and its water were the focal point of the site. The complex was arranged to manifest the path taking the rulers to paradise through the pure mosque of the Earth, which culminates in the *qubba*s representing domes of heaven.[39]

The question of the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa*

The dating of the north-eastern part of the complex, i.e. the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa* (no. 10) and the *muṣallā* (no. 11) is problematic. With their rich decoration and the latter's once probably splendid roof structure,[40] they might have been intended to represent the sovereign's munificence towards religious projects, and we may say the same of the sumptuous gate that leads to the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa* from the first courtyard (no. 2).

The site was furnished for pilgrims, and at this point we should not forget the almost unique aspect of Shāla designed for them: the corridor for

[39] We have learnt from studies by Oleg Grabar and others the basic meaning of this structure; see, for example his "The Islamic Dome: Some Considerations", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 22 (1963): 191–8; *idem*, "From Dome of Heaven to Pleasure Dome", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49 (1990): 15–21. The idea of paradise could not have been expressed in a more obvious way in Shāla, most of the Qurʾānic inscriptions on Abū l-Ḥasan's *qubba* refer to heaven or the day of judgement. These are the Qurʾān, 2 (*Sūrat al-Baqarā*), 285; 3 (*Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*), 133, 135 (first part from both) and 185; and 16 (*Sūrat al-Naḥl*), 31–2. The texts are collected in Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 288, 292, although the Qurʾān references there are mostly incorrect. Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 776/1375) praises the gardens (the Arabic *janna* means both garden and paradise) of Shāla in one of his poems; Lisān al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Khaṭīb, *Raqm al-ḥulal fī naẓm al-duwal* (Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿUmūmiyya, 1316AH), pp. 98–100. One might find it surprising that, although Muḥammad Būjandār mentions the paradise garden of Shāla upon reading Ibn al-Khaṭīb (Būjandār, *Shāla wa-āthāru-hā*, 55), only Riyaz Mansur Latif renewed this notion in 2011 (Latif, *Ornate Vision*, 37).

[40] In the unpublished manuscript of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Dukkālī, *Al-durra al-yatīma fī waṣf Shāla l-ḥadītha wa-l-qadīma* (written in the early twentieth century), the author mentions the *qubba* of a mosque in Shāla, but Ismāʿīl rejects the possibility that this prayer hall could have been covered with a dome; Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 80–1. Marçais proposed a pyramidal roof analogous with several contemporary *madrasa*s (Marçais, *L'Architecture musulmane*, 283).



Figure 7. The garden of Shāla

circumambulation around the *miḥrāb*.[41] This feature is more reminiscent of a *zāwiya* than a *madrasa*, although the general architectural features recall the numerous *madrasa*s built by the Marīnids.

According to Ismāʿīl, the common funerary hall of the martyrs, built by Abū l-Ḥasan, was joined to the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa* without any logical connection, and so he gave the latter structure an earlier date, saying that it could not have been made by the same patron, but was most probably constructed by Abū Saʿīd II.[42] However, the dome of the martyrs had not been conceived of previously; it was the defeat in 741/1340 that forced the patron to create a burial site for the deceased. This immediate need and lack of space on the site, where buildings had already been constructed, can easily explain the archaeological incongruity. Accordingly, we cannot exclude Abū l-Ḥasan as a possible founder of the *madrasa*/ *zāwiya*.

Decisive evidence of the patron and type of building might have been found in the dedicatory inscription (Figure 8), if it were full and reliable. But the tiles were found in fragments in 1930, then pieced together and reconstructed into one line, twice as long as the inscription we have today. Some years ago it used to read:

> Praise be to God, the One; this *zāwiya* was founded by our master, the scholar, the lieutenant, the caliph, the leader of the believers (*amīr al-muʾminīn*), the sultan Abū Saʿīd ʿUthmān, who died in 25 *Dhū l-Qaʿda* 731 [30 August 1331].[43]

This inscription seems to prove that Abū Saʿīd II built a *zāwiya* (and not a *madrasa*), but the text is rather problematic. The Marīnid rulers always used the title *amīr al-muslimīn* (leader of the Muslims) and only Abū ʿInān preferred to be referred to as

[41] The circumambulation of pilgrims was still current in the twentieth century. For the rituals, see Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 419–22.
[42] Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 324–33.
[43] For the discovery of the inscription and the Arabic text, see Ismāʿīl, *Dirāsāt jadīda*, 193–6, 200, Figure 71. Quite recently half of the inscription has disappeared; compare Latif, *Ornate Vision*, Figure 1.20 with Figure 8 in the present article.



Figure 8. The dedicatory inscription of the *zāwiya*

amīr al-muʾminīn.[44] The fact that the Marīnids took special care in the wording of inscriptions makes this dedicatory text inconclusive, and it might be considered a twentieth-century forgery. Consequently, the epigraphic evidence does not help us to reach a final answer. At this point, we can only conjecture a building phase by Abū Saʿīd II, and also that someone commemorated it with an inscription after his death. We shall now turn to archaeological sources.

The most interesting part of the building for establishing the structural sequence is the south-western wall of the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa*, especially between the dome of the martyrs and the prayer hall, where two parallel walls were built together. The outer one runs along the prayer hall, while the inner continues in the other direction as far as the north-western wall of the *khalwa*. The southern corner of the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa* (Figure 9) shows that the outer wall was built first, then the north-western wall of the prayer hall (because the latter leans against the former), and finally the inner wall of the *zāwiya*/ *madrasa* (because it fills the remaining space), but the wall still predates the cell partitions along it. From all these structures we can only date the inner wall. Because it encompasses the dome of the martyrs, it must have been built by Abū l-Ḥasan after 741/1340. One point deserves special attention: the walls of the prayer hall do not date from the same phase as the cell partitions, and the inner wall was built between those two phases. Consequently, we should look for one construction before and one after Abū l-Ḥasan's dome of the martyrs.

I would like to suggest that the outer brick wall once encompassed Abū Saʿīd II's building (a *zāwiya*), of which only the prayer hall and most of this wall remain. Then, in order to make a space for the dome of the martyrs, Abū l-Ḥasan had to demolish part of the enclosure. The inner stone wall was needed for structural reasons to support the weight of the dome, and it reached as far as the wall of the prayer hall at the southern corner of the *zāwiya*. A third building phase took place after the completion of the dome of the martyrs, when Abū l-Ḥasan had to partly reconstruct the *zāwiya*. Reassuringly, the dedicatory inscription can be attributed to Abū l-Ḥasan, who commemorated his father's achievement posthumously; he only modified the building.

We have seemingly explained the different building phases and even the dedicatory inscription can be considered mostly correct, in that the *zāwiya* of Abū Saʿīd II existed. We can also mention a further piece of evidence: the *ḥabūs* (endowment) text of Shāla's *zāwiya*. Although it is unfortunately fragmentary, with no sign of a

[44] David S. Powers, *Law, Society, and Culture in the Maghrib, 1300–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 82; see also Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 41–5.



Figure 9. The southern corner of the *zāwiya-madrasa*, the junction of the outer (1) and the inner (3) walls of the *zāwiya-madrasa*, and the north-western wall of the prayer hall (2). The numerals indicate the chronological sequence.

date or founder's name, Ismāʿīl has convincingly related it to the building of Abū Saʿīd II on the basis of analogous *ḥabūs* texts.[45]

The only problem arises upon reading a mostly overlooked historical source of al-Numayrī (d. after 774/1372), the most informative and descriptive account of Shāla among the primary written sources. It clearly mentions Abū ʿInān and his foundation of a *madrasa* next to the *qubba*s,[46] and this building can only be identified with the "*zāwiya*" of Abū Saʿīd II, which markedly resembles the Marīnid *madrasa*s. Abū ʿInān either reconstructed the building and converted it into a *madrasa*, or at least claimed to have done so. Since the building in Shāla clearly follows the well-established layout of the *madrasa*s, I believe that Abū ʿInān carried out the last building phase on this structure, but probably only added the partition walls between the cells.

The former *zāwiya* could easily provide what was needed for the religious rites performed on the site and receive the pilgrims, who clearly arrived in great numbers. Ibn al-Khaṭīb and al-Numayrī – among others – mention that sanctity of the site and the religious practices performed there were widely known.[47] The

[45] For the text of the inscription, see Ismāʿīl, *Dirāsāt jadīda*, 204–5, figs. 73–6, for the attribution, see ibid. 212–22.

[46] Ibn al-Ḥājj al-Numayrī, *Fayḍ al-ʿubāb wa-ifāḍat qidāḥ al-ādāb fī l-ḥaraka al-saʿīda ilā Qasanṭīna wa-l-Zāb*, ed. Muḥammad b. Shaqrūn (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), p. 199.

[47] For Ibn al-Khaṭīb's writings about the site, see Būjandār, *Shāla wa-āthāru-hā*, 46–8, 53–4; Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 22–5; also al-Numayrī, *Fayḍ al-ʿubāb*, 197–201. It has also been proposed that the building on the left side of the main gate was a hospice for pilgrims built by Abū l-Ḥasan or more probably by Abū ʿInān (Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 81–4). Ismāʿīl identifies this structure as a *zāwiya*, although without detailing the relevant evidence (Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 31–2). The baths in Shāla can also be considered as a basic facility on a pilgrimage site. It has also been proposed that some finds during more recent excavations in Shāla were connected with pilgrimage (Abdelaziz El Khayari, Ahmed Ettahiri and Mohammed Kbiri-Alaoui, "Chellah, de l'Antiquité aux pélerinage-moussem", *Nouvelles Archéologiques et Patrimoniales* 2 (1998): 4–6).

only remaining question concerns the motives of Abū ʿInān, and we shall return to this in the final section of our study.

Founding the sacred *ribāṭ*

After enumerating Shāla's most important Marīnid buildings, giving them their most likely interpretation and venturing to establish their chronological order, we should return to the question of the *ribāṭ* for a moment.

As we have seen, Abū Yūsuf had in mind a family complex with tombs for both pious and political reasons. The site was meant to be a place of veneration for local inhabitants and pilgrims; their pious practices would help to keep the dynasty's star in the ascendant and ensure intercession for deceased family members on the day of judgement. Abū l-Ḥasan did not change the purpose of the site but re-designed it on a grandiose scale. The surrounding wall was meant to enclose the already existing garden of paradise, as well as to create a pilgrimage site with markets, as we find in the description by Muḥammad b. ʿAbbād (d. 792/1390).[48]

The connection with *jihād* is clearly not indicated by either the complex or the inscriptions.[49] Thus we could conclude that the *ribāṭ* of Shāla was a religious community site with pious practices for deceased legal rulers and some others, but in one respect – the rampart and the towers – it does undeniably resemble a *jihād*-fighters' fortress. These features may have referred to the *mujāhid* aspect of the dead rulers, but could also be understood as the reappearance of a form representative of the *ribāṭ*, albeit without the fighters and with a different meaning, that of a *zāwiya*.

Since the question of the meaning of *ribāṭ* in this case remains unanswered, we should review the way the site was used. As we have seen, there were more applicants for mausolea in Abū l-Ḥasan's time, among them his son, Abū Mālik, who died on *jihād* in Andalusia, and other relatives.[50] Abū ʿInān followed this tradition when he had a *qubba* built for his mother, Shams al-Ḍuḥā (d. 750/1349), finished his father's mausoleum, and interred his sister, al-Ḥurra al-Muʿaẓẓama[51] and also his father's vizier, Abū Zayyān al-Suwaydī (d. 755/1354),[52] in Shāla. The most interesting occasion in the present context is probably the entombment of the martyrs of Tarifa, who were killed on the battlefield of Andalusia in 741/1340 and were transferred to Shāla by Abū l-Ḥasan.

These historical facts lead us in two opposite directions when we look for a conclusion: one is that Shāla is the site of a family necropolis, and the other is that it is the burial place of the *mujāhid*s. We have now arrived at the long-awaited interpretation of Shāla: the site did not strictly follow either of these routes. Those who were buried were intended to be commemorated for different reasons. The *mujāhid* aspect does not appear in most cases, but it undeniably played an important role in some of the burials, so Ibn al-Khaṭīb was partly correct in his

[48] *Kitāb rasāʾil al-kubrā*, the relevant passage is translated in Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 26.
[49] One might argue against this on the basis of the epithets of the rulers, among which the word *mujāhid* appears, for example on Abū l-Ḥasan's funerary stone. For the text and its translation, see *ibid.*, 423–4. However, the rulers used the word *mujāhid* on numerous other monuments that had no connection with *jihād* – for example on *madrasa*s.
[50] See Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 142.
[51] Al-Numayrī, *Fayḍ al-ʿubāb*, 197–9.
[52] Ibn Marzūq, *Al-musnad al-ṣaḥīḥ al-ḥasan*, 368; al-Numayrī, *Fayḍ al-ʿubāb*, 200.

conception.[53] The reasons for reverence might have differed, but the most important reason was definitely the princely family's right. Ensuring the commemoration of deceased family members was the original intention and in this the rulers succeeded. Then came the occasions during Abū l-Ḥasan's reign, when someone desired to be venerated as a warrior of *jihād*, and was allowed to be buried inside the commemorative *ribāṭ*, a dynastic necropolis with its paradise.

The word *ribāṭ* can also be explained as opposing the already existing *zāwiya* built in Shāla by Abū Saʿīd II. The *zāwiya* was a smaller, functioning building in the *khalwa*, but Abū l-Ḥasan claims to have built the surrounding walls, thus calling to mind fortified complexes, but fulfilling the same pious role as a *zāwiya*.

Abū ʿInān and his *madrasa*

The incorporation of a *madrasa* into a funerary complex comes as no surprise, and the closest analogy can be found at the shrine of Abū Madyan Shuʿayb (d. 594/1197) near Tlemcen, founded by Abū l-Ḥasan in 739/1338–39. A notable difference in this complex is that accommodation for pilgrims and *zāwiya* dwellers can also be found beside the *madrasa*.[54]

Concerning Abū ʿInān's reconstruction in Shāla, the only peculiarity is the removal of much-needed accommodation for pilgrims. The answer to this anomaly may be found in the structure next to the main gate of Shāla, which probably functioned as hostelry and *zāwiya*,[55] and we can assume that it was built by Abū ʿInān to replace the one in the *khalwa*. According to Ibn ʿAbbād, the *zāwiya* was built for the *ṣūfī* ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Yabūrī, who taught there around the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century.[56]

If we use the various terms for types of building conventionally, we might mistakenly suspect that there were strict divisions between the meanings of these terms. In fact, we should not consider that there was necessarily a sharp change in the functions of the *zāwiya-madrasa* of Shāla after it was refurbished; occasional pilgrims may well have been welcome along with the students and mystics.

The *madrasa*'s siting in the *khalwa* can reasonably be connected to the most basic political aim of the Marīnids established since the time of Abū Yūsuf: to be commemorated and venerated by their subjects and especially by the religious elite. For this reason, the Marīnids founded *madrasa*s in other cities and educated loyal religious and administrative intellectuals. This political intention might have been even more effective at the main site of their veneration.

[53] In one of his letters, Ibn al-Khaṭīb praises Abū l-Ḥasan and his ancestors as *jihād* warriors who built their necropolis, but this text in itself does not necessarily indicate that they connected the two ideas. The conception of Ibn al-Khaṭīb sounds more like a later sense of reverence and there is no doubt that it conflicts with some of the burials. He venerated the *mujāhid*s of Shāla, but this had not been the original aim of Shāla's patrons. The text is quoted in Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqarī al-Tilimsānī (d. 1632), *Nafḥ al-ṭīb min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, volumes I–VIII (Beirut: Dār Maṣādir, 1408/1988), IV: 408.

[54] For a description of this complex, see Sheila S. Blair, "Sufi Saints and Shrine Architecture in the Early Fourteenth Century", *Muqarnas* 7 (1990): pp. 35–49, esp. 37–40.

[55] Thus, we might accept both interpretations about this building: Basset and Lévi-Provençal, "Chella", 81–4; Ismāʿīl, *Ḥafāʾir Shāla*, 31–2.

[56] Paul Nwiya, *Ibn ʿAbbād de Ronda (1332–1390): Un mystique prédicateur à la Qarawīyīn de Fès* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1961), p. 62.